



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

MEETING MINUTES

June 14, 2011 | 7:30 p.m.

Attendance

Setti D. Warren
Mayor

Commissioners: Daphne Collins (Chair), Chris Steele (Vice Chair), Jack Leader (Secretary), Barry Abramson, David Abromowitz, Charles Eisenberg, Peter Kai Jung Lew, Ronald Lipof, Joyce Moss, Darryl Settles

Candace Havens
Director
Planning & Development

Staff: Candace Havens, Amanda Stout

Guests: Bob Frazier, Bob Halpin, Bill Renke, Frank Stearns

Absent: Robert Gifford, Jane Ives, John Pears, Philip Plottel

Amanda Stout
Senior Economic
Development Planner

Agenda Items

1. EDC Project Review – Chestnut Hill Shopping Center

- The project, which filed for a special permit, was presented by Frank Stearns (attorney, K&L Gates) and Bob Frazier (W/S Development).
- Frazier explained that Weiner Development has over 70 shopping centers in New England, including Legacy Place in Dedham which was referenced as an example “lifestyle center” several times in the discussion, and that they pay special attention to the long-term relationships with their existing tenants. This Chestnut Hill Shopping Center proposal is an example of their work in creatively redeveloping and re-tenanting older shopping centers to enhance their value and sustainability. Frazier also highlighted sections of the Newton Comprehensive Plan, suggesting that the project is consistent with the City’s aim of encouraging development in existing business zones rather than encroaching on residential areas.

- The proposal includes removal of an existing middle piece of the shopping center and construction of a new middle building. The new building would include first floor retail, second floor retail or office, and a third floor with offices for the headquarters of W/S Development, which represents moving approximately 100 new jobs from the current office in Brookline across Route 9 to Newton.

- The applicant is seeking approval of a restaurant with greater than 50 seats. Frazier and Stearns noted that in the past, they received a permit for a 275-seat restaurant, found a tenant (The Cottage), and then the tenant only needed 190-seats. With this special permit application, they are again preemptively seeking approval for a larger restaurant, suggesting that this pre-approval is helpful in attracting a tenant and giving the tenant flexibility in determining the number of seats they actually need.

Commissioners

Daphne Collins, Chair
Christopher Steele,
Vice Chair
Jack Leader, Secretary

Barry Abramson
David Abromowitz
Charles Eisenberg
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- W/S Development has a long-term lease on the state-owned frontage road that parallels Route 9, and they plan to make it more pedestrian-friendly to make the site more attractive to commercial tenants. The applicant is seeking a parking waiver from the Board of Aldermen on the grounds that there is a lot of shared parking on the site. They have engaged a parking consultant and also consult aerial photos taken the day after Thanksgiving to look at peak parking demand.
- **Opinion of EDC members in attendance:** The members agreed to support this project. Motion to authorize Daphne Collins to write a letter to the Land Use Committee of the Board of Aldermen stating this opinion (9-0-1) (Lipof, seconded by Abramson; Abromowitz abstained from the discussion and vote).

2. Project Updates

- **Austin Street JAPG** – Candace Havens and Jack Leader updated the Commission on the progress of the Joint Advisory Planning Group. There was brief discussion of the City’s zoning ordinance that imposes an inclusionary housing requirement on new hotels in the City, and there was interest in further exploring this topic. Leader explained that the JAPG would likely recommend that the site be zoned to B-4 in advance of issuance of the RFP. The JAPG report and the Planning Department staff report are available online: <http://www.newtonma.gov/Planning/austin/austinst.asp>
- **Riverside** – The development team has hosted several recent meetings. Collins, Steele, and Lipof attended a meeting organized by the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce at the Hotel Indigo, and Moss attended a neighborhood meeting at the Williams School. There was brief discussion of the current proposal, which includes decreased office and increased residential square footage from previous proposals. The development team will likely present to the EDC at the appropriate time. The Planning Department might ask the EDC to help with fiscal impact and/or use the recently created financial model to help analyze the project at the appropriate point in time.
- Havens noted that the Economic Development Cluster, which is comprised of Department Heads and other City staff, is also examining barriers to entry for business.
- Havens explained that staff has been preparing reports about parking in-lieu fees and retail overlay districts. These will likely go before the Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP) of the Board of Aldermen in the fall, and the EDC might comment and make suggestions at or shortly before these proposals go to Public Hearing at ZAP.

3. EDC Membership Updates

- The appointments of Barry Abramson and David Abromowitz were approved by ZAP and the full Board of Aldermen.
- Matt Cuddy has resigned from the Commission. Members signed a certificate thanking him for his service and particularly for his contributions and enthusiasm for Business Improvement Districts and village-focused planning and economic development.

4. EDC Strategy

- Ron Lipof told the Commission about a recent meeting he had with Newark, New Jersey officials about how they knocked down barriers to development and have attracted companies. Global companies, including Manischewitz wines, have recently moved their headquarters to Newark and are praising the city. Lipof used this as an example of how cities can think about new ideas for business attraction and retention.
- Commissioners noted the need to define what we mean by economic development and some of the problems we are trying to solve – More jobs? Increased nightlife? Expedited

permitting? They noted the importance of marketing Newton to new companies, but also emphasized structural impediments to business. There might be different barriers to entry and attraction/retention strategies for small village-center businesses and for large companies.

- Commissioners wondered whether someone in the City does “exit interviews” with companies that come to Newton or leave Newton. The subject of basic economic development statistics was also raised. The Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT) might help the City work these and other similar questions.

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Amanda Stout, AICP

Sr. Economic Development Planner